



ABOVE: Setting up the South African Airways 'From sky to Africa' garden. This gold medal award-winning garden at the recent Cape Town Flower Show at Lourensford Estate, was inspired by the work of Shunmyo Masuno, and created using a set of design principles for an indigenous South African garden of sanctuary and repose.

Gardening for the mind and senses

by **Donovan Gillman**, Roomtogrow, Centre for Home Gardening, Kirstenbosch

The theme for the Kirstenbosch Branch of the Botanical Society's Annual Plant Fair this March is 'Waterwise planting for small gardens'. Before you rush in and buy inappropriately, I want to examine how we can meaningfully incorporate the wealth of indigenous plants we see growing in Kirstenbosch and in the mountains and coastal areas around us into our gardens.

Most plant lovers I know have too many plants in their gardens. I am the same, and like my mother before me, Vicky Gillman, I irritate my spouse by bringing home yet another rare, tender and expensive plant, that in all likelihood will end up languishing in a bag or pot, or dying of neglect before I could find a suitable place for it! Most of our gardens resemble a fruit salad with an assortment of pickings from various forays to nurseries and plant fairs and no matter how much loving care and 'Bounce Back' we lavish on them, they remain rather unsatisfying.

I am horrified every time I drive past the council refuse dump in Constantia and see the mountains of branches pruned from unsuitably planted trees and shrubs. Most of these are the result of random planting by eager landscapers or quick sales by nurserymen to an unknowing public with no thought for their ultimate growth habits. I am also con-

stantly asked what indigenous plants will grow in the shade of gardens where too many trees have been planted by owners or landscapers desperate to screen some neighbouring property or unsightly view or to create a wind shield from the Cape Doctor.

According to Shunmyo Masuno, a Japanese monk who builds modern gardens of amazing interest and form using traditional Zen principles and techniques of gardening, a garden is 'a place for the mind to inhabit.' What he means is that there needs to be an underlying structure that reflects the intention or purpose of the garden. Is it a garden for children to play in, or one to entertain friends, or a space to grow rare plants in, or simply to have a pleasing surrounding for our home? A lack of purpose is evident in many gardens, so our disappointment with our efforts is the result of not identifying what we are gardening for and planning appropriately.

Often we are inspired by the pictures in books and magazines of what others have achieved or we slavishly follow the dictates of the latest fashion and so a pastiche of English country, Tuscan, minimalist or Zen styles is traipsed across our gardens, homes and lives. In the words of Vincent Van Gogh, 'It is not the language of painters but the language of nature which one should listen to, the feeling for the things

themselves, for reality, is more important than the feeling for pictures.' If we study the underlying principles of nature we will be able to reveal its hidden purpose in our works, and not slavishly imitate the works of others. This does not mean we cannot benefit from what others have learnt – it is only by such study that we can ourselves reach new heights – but merely imitating without understanding our own situation, is bound to lead to a superficial and unsatisfactory result.

But can we simply imitate nature? After all, surely if we just mix everything together we will have a pleasing result? This is rather like taking the first things that come to hand in the kitchen or fridge, putting them all together in a pot and serving up a 'hot-pot'. While this might satisfy your hunger, the art of cooking requires more care and attention to achieve a pleasing result. Having recently been involved in judging the Kirstenbosch 'Gardens of Pride' competition, I am again struck by people's lack of understanding of the possibilities of gardening using indigenous plants. The general impression is that people equate it to a 'wild garden'. No matter how beautiful or how admirable it might be to do, a garden is not a piece of veld! Paul Klee said, 'Art does not reproduce the visible, it renders visible.' What Klee intended in his Bauhaus lectures was that we should look within to find the meaning of what we encounter in the world, we need a language we can understand and master, in order to produce art (or our gardens or lifestyle). 'Life doesn't simply happen to us, we

produce it. That's what style is: it's producing life!' says Bruce Mau in his latest book, *Lifestyle*, on his design firm's attitudes and influences in creating designs for many of the worlds largest corporations.

The creation of a garden

I regard gardening as an art form and I believe that it is possible to mould a garden (and your lifestyle) to reflect a peaceful inner state of being. A space to inspire and re-energise. And as our open spaces decrease and the pressures of life grow more and more onerous, we need a place to retreat to, where we can feel a little of nature's rejuvenating power and where our ability to adapt to change is increased.

At the recent Cape Town Flower Show at Lourensford Estate, I was inspired by the work of Shunmyo to create the South African Airways 'From sky to Africa' garden. It was created as a garden of sanctuary and repose – a place of calm in an otherwise hectic and busy show environment. Visitors were drawn into an enclosed space, a sensory experience which changed with time and individual viewers, to reflect the story and drama of their lives. In a symbolic sense the use of water and stones, the essence of the African drama, expresses the need for adaptability in the face of constant change. Water is itself without form; unconditionally embracing and adapting to any form it encounters. It was my intention that people visiting this garden would deepen their understanding of their culture, time and value.

After having crossed a pathway of sandstone squares through a copse of trees, you could stand or sit quietly in the pavilion viewing the landscape; see the stone forms, with old succulent plants and soft grasses moving in the breeze; look up and see the sky and awesome enclosing mountains; be entranced by the light reflected from glass bead sculptures of human forms within the landscape and reminisce on your existence and learn about how you might live in the future.

A philosophy for gardening

To postulate some principals of a philosophy for gardening (and living), a garden's style or form should be of its place and its time in a world increasingly made the same by globalisation, advertising and consumerism. It must be rooted in the place where you live. The materials you use should be locally made: organic compost and fertilisers, natural stone and rock and the indigenous (from the area) plants and trees.

Incorporate the work of local artists and craftsmen: supporting them helps them survive and creates interest and individuality in a world increasingly the same. A reed broom, a wind sculpture from a hawker or a concrete lizard or bird from the sculptors along the road next to Macassar can make all the difference.

Encourage birds, butterflies and wildlife. Although we know that many of these are going to give us trouble – guinea fowl scratching up our bulbs, caterpillars munching our greens, moles burrowing through our small lawns and

Visitors were drawn into an enclosed space, cut off from the hurly burly of the show, and given a chance for a moment of quiet reflection. In a symbolic sense the use of water and stones, the essence of the African drama, expresses the need for adaptability in the face of constant change. Water is itself without form; unconditionally embracing and adapting to any form it encounters.



baboons rooting in our rubbish bins – it is important to understand that planting wildlife refuges in the city creates a corridor for them to get to and from the isolated pockets of wilderness that are left. In this way we are contributing to the survival of the breadth and diversity of life.

Embrace waterwise plant choices and 'xeriscape' methods of gardening. Waterwise gardening cuts down on water, preserves the beauty of the garden, the diversity of plants and the value an established garden adds to property. 'Xeriscaping' is a word that combines *xeros* (Greek for dry) with landscape. Plants that are appropriate to the local climate are selected, and care is taken to avoid losing water to evaporation and run-off. 'Xeriscape' is a trademark created by the Denver Water Board, and is based on seven principles: planning and design, limiting turf areas, selecting and zoning plants appropriately, improving the soil, using mulches, irrigating efficiently and doing appropriate maintenance.

Incorporate or at least suggest the use of water in your garden, as in a dry river bed, water features like an urn with water at a drain down pipe, or wall-mounted water features.

Select plants that will be an appropriate size when fully grown. Be familiar with their growth rate for the purpose they are to serve.

Space should be organized to provide a balance between usage areas, such as play areas, work areas, braai patios or swimming pools and viewing areas from windows and seating vantage points. Unightly and intruding views should be appropriately screened. 'Borrow' scenery – glimpses of the mountains, a sea view or even just a pleasing tree or shrub in the neighbour's garden.

There should be a sense of completeness in the garden that is in keeping with the general atmosphere and style of the home. This does not mean that a cottage in a 'Tuscan development' needs lavender hedges and cypresses, but rather that the scale and features are of a richness and form that complements the house and extends the home into the garden.

Create seasonal interest and change throughout the year, even if this means that we learn to appreciate the dead and drying flower heads of grasses, restios and *Agapanthus*, rather than trying to make them conform to a simplistic view of their beauty only when they are flowering. Planting perennials that flower and die down between evergreen perennials or shrubs is a sensible option, such as the yellow *Chasmanthe* between *Agapanthus* at the entrance to Kirstenbosch.

Now if you expected a list of plants to buy at the Kirstenbosch Plant Fair and are disappointed or intrigued by this article, I can only suggest you examine what it is you want from your garden, or come and see us at the Centre For Home Gardening at Kirstenbosch for advice. 🍷

Further reading

- Brookes, John. 2002. *The New Garden*. Dorling Kindersley.
Dickey, P. 1997. *Breaking ground: Portraits of ten garden designers*. Artisan.
Nose, Michiko. 2002. *The modern Japanese garden*. Mitchell Beazley.
Joffe, Pitta. 2001. *Creative gardening with indigenous plants*. Briza.
Van Jaarsveld, Ernst. 2000. *Wonderful waterwise gardening*. Tafelberg.
<http://www-dwaf.pwv.gov.za/>
<http://www.denverwater.org/indexmain.html>



A pathway of sandstone squares draws visitors towards this garden through a copse of trees into a place of quiet and repose: a garden to reminisce on your existence and contemplate your future.

KIRSTENBOSCH GARDEN FAIR 18/19 MARCH 2006 09h00 – 16h00



The 31st annual Kirstenbosch Garden Fair will take place at the Stone Cottages ground opposite the main entrance to Kirstenbosch Gardens.

The Demonstration Garden will be landscaped by Roomtogrow and will feature waterwise planting for small gardens (**See adjacent article**).

Kirstenbosch horticulturists will be on hand throughout the Fair to offer advice and assistance.

The current plant availability list can be found on our website:
www.botanicalsociety.org.za

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